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On the mind dependence of truth

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On the mind dependence of truth

The claim that truth is mind dependent has some initial plausibility only if truth bearers are taken to be mind dependent entities such as beliefs or statements. Even on that assumption, however, the claim is not uncontroversial. If it is spelled out as the thesis that "in a world devoid of mind nothing would be true", then everything depends on how the phrase 'true in world *w*' is interpreted. If 'A is true in *w*' it is interpreted as 'A is true *of w*' (i.e. '*w* satisfies A's truth conditions'), the claim need not be true. If on the other hand it is interpreted as 'A is true *of w and exists in w*' then the claim is trivially true, though devoid of any antirealist efficacy. Philosophers like Heidegger and Rorty, who hold that truth is mind dependent but reality is not, must regard such principles as "A if and only if it is true that A" as only contingently true, which may be a good reason to reject the mind dependence of truth anyway.

1. "What is 'be true' supposed to mean in a world in which there are no statements to be true nor minds to have true beliefs?", asked Richard Rorty a few years ago (1991a: 3); the implicit answer being 'nothing whatsoever'. Rorty's claim has been taken to be that if there were no *people* it would not be true that there are e.g. mountains or stars (though there might *be* mountains, or stars) (Glock 1997: 100). However, this cannot have been Rorty's point, for even in a world devoid of people (i.e. of human beings) other creatures might have minds, and, consequently, beliefs, some of them true.

It could be argued that, as Rorty is literally talking about the *meaning* of the phrase 'be true', his point might be that in a world without *language users* the phrase would have no meaning, hence no application: nothing would be called 'true' in such a world. I take Rorty's claim to be stronger. His imagined world is one in which "there are no statements to be true nor minds to have true beliefs": his point appears to be that such a world would contain no *truth bearers*, be they statements or beliefs. In such a world, it would also be the case that the expression 'be true' (or, for that matter, any other expression) is not in use, hence has no meaning; however, the point is not that (consequently) nothing would be called true. The point is that nothing would *be* true, for want of truth bearers. When he says that 'be true' would have no meaning in such a world, Rorty means that the phrase would have no application not for lack of language users but for lack of truth candidates.

What kind of world is Rorty talking about? We already saw that he cannot be talking of a possible world devoid of humans. Nor can he be talking about *our* world, i.e. about the Earth in its remote past, before any minded creatures inhabited it: for then, other beings in the Universe might have had minds. Hence he must be talking either about a non-minded possible world, or about our own Universe at some globally pre-minded stage. At some point we shall want to distinguish the two cases; for the moment, we shall assume that Rorty is putting forth the contention that *in a non-minded possible world*, i.e. in a world where no beings have

minds, the phrase ‘be true’ would have no meaning. ‘Having no meaning’, in turn, will be interpreted as ‘having no point’: in a non-minded world the concept of truth would have no point, for there would be nothing there in relation to which the issue of whether the concept applies to it could be raised. In a non-minded world there are no truth candidates. To make things simple, I will henceforth identify Rorty’s claim with thesis (R):

(R) If world w is non-minded, nothing is true in w .

Many years earlier, a similar, though not identical thesis had been put forth by Martin Heidegger. Heidegger had claimed that before the advent of minded existence, there was no truth, nor will there be any after minded existence will disappear. (Indeed, as we shall see, Heidegger had put forth an even stronger claim: that before Newton’s laws were discovered, they were not true – or, as he put it, ‘true’). I will try to point out both the similarities and the differences between his views and Rorty’s.

That truth is mind dependent is a sweeping claim. I will try to show that, unless truth is directly *defined* so as to be mind dependent (as with Heidegger, §§7-8), the claim has very limited import. Its *prima facie* antirealistic efficacy depends on an ambiguity in the phrase ‘true in world w ’ (§3). Once the ambiguity is resolved the efficacy is lost, for in one reading the claim is plainly false, while in the other it is predicated on assumptions that are far from irresistible and which the realist has no special reasons to accept (§5). Finally, I will show that the claim (in both versions, Rorty’s and Heidegger’s) is inconsistent with the necessitation of the Denominalization Schema, “ p if and only if it is true that p ” (§§ 9-10). This is as it should be, for partisans of the mind dependence of truth will be inclined to believe that the Schema only holds in ‘minded’ worlds, not in all possible worlds. Others, of course, will see in the failure of the Schema’s necessitation a further reason to reject the claim that truth is mind dependent.

2. Rorty’s argument for (R) appears to be based on the mind dependence of truth bearers. He seems to presuppose that truth bearers are either statements or beliefs (or both); as both statements and beliefs depend for their existence on the existence of minds¹, in a non-minded world there would be none, hence nothing could be true in such a world, hence nothing would be true. Thus, it seems that in order to defuse the argument it suffices to reject the identification of the truth bearers with mind dependent entities: just assume that truth bearers are mind-*independent* entities, e.g. Fregean propositions. That “many a truth will never even

be non-committally entertained or formulated, let alone accepted or asserted” has been taken to count against identifying truth bearers with beliefs or statements (cf. Künné 203: 380); in the same vein, it could be argued that truth bearers should not be identified with beliefs or statements, for if they were it would turn out that nothing is true in a non-minded world (=R). This would amount to assuming that the claim that in a world where there are e.g. stars it is not *true* that there are stars is so clearly counterintuitive that a *reductio* can be based on it.

The option of not taking truth bearers to be mind dependent entities is a live one, of course, independently of opinions concerning truth in non-minded worlds. However, rejecting the identification of truth bearers with beliefs or statements *just because* it entails (R) amounts to preempting the issue against Rorty: (R) is simply regarded as preposterous to begin with. But, aside from that, the genuine issue seems to be both more complex and partly independent of how one identifies truth bearers. Take a non-minded world where there are stars: wouldn't *my* belief that there are stars be true in such a world? The answer appears to hinge on how the phrase 'true in a world' is interpreted.

3. Let us define 'A is true *of* a world *w*' as 'A's truth conditions are satisfied by the way things are in *w*'². By saying that A is true *in* a world *w* we can mean either

(a) A exists in *w* and is true of *w* (the *existentially committed* reading, 'existential' for short)

or

(b) A is true of *w* (the *existentially neutral* reading, 'neutral' for short).

Some philosophers seem to think that the neutral reading is the only legitimate reading of 'true in *w*' (Glock 1997: 101-102; see also fn. 1 above); surely this is the favored reading in the context of possible worlds semantics (see e.g. Kripke 1963a, 1963b; Hughes and Cresswell 1968: 177-178). Thus Stephen Yablo, while commenting on Kripke, emphasizes that the phrase 'true in world *w*' should not suggest that a sentence S "is to be seen as *inhabiting* the world(s) with respect to which it is evaluated. That is certainly not Kripke's intent. His view is better captured by saying that S...to be necessary, should be true *of* all possible worlds. Every world should be such that S gives a correct description of it" (2002: 444). I.e., only the neutral reading is in accordance with Kripke's view.

Other philosophers, on the contrary, appear to think that ‘true in w ’ should be given the existential reading, although the concept which is expressed by the neutral reading also has a legitimate role to play. Thus Aviv Hoffmann (2003: 645) makes a distinction between a proposition’s being true *with respect to* a possible world w (the neutral reading) and a proposition’s being true *in* w (the existential reading), and he explicitly rules out that a proposition’s being true with respect to w could be the same as its being true *in* w .³ Benson Mates (1986: 94-95) drew a parallel distinction between being true *of* a world (neutral reading) and being true *in* a world (existential reading).⁴ He also wanted to reserve the phrase ‘true in w ’ for the existential reading, although he thought that the interesting notion was the one expressed by the neutral reading: “We are not interested in what would have happened to the sentence itself if the given world had existed. We wish...that ‘There are no sentences’ is true of any possible world in which there are no people and hence no languages, even though *in* such a world the sentence...would not even exist, let alone be true”.

Tim Williamson (2002) has objected to the distinction as applied to propositions. If he is right, the distinction does not apply to propositions, though it may hold for other categories of truth bearers (Williamson admits that it does hold for utterances, 2002: 240). As far as propositions are concerned, his main objection⁵ is that the notion of a proposition’s being true of w cannot be spelled out on the model of a predicate’s being true of an object o . Suppose we say that the proposition that Berlusconi is Prime Minister of Italy in 2005 is true of the actual world @ and false of some other world w . Applying the model of predicative truth-of, this means that the proposition contains a hidden variable x : if the variable is saturated by world @ the resulting (closed) proposition is true, while if it is saturated by w the proposition is false. However, in either case the resulting proposition will not to be contingent (e.g., it is not contingent that Berlusconi is *actually* Prime Minister in 2005). “[The proposition’s] contingency requires it not to have a variable waiting to be assigned a world” (2002: 239). Williamson’s point is that a proposition’s being true at a world w (as I will neutrally say) must not preclude its contingency: but if ‘true at w ’ is interpreted as ‘true of w ’, the latter being conceived on the model of predicative truth-of, then a proposition’s being true at w does preclude its contingency. It could be replied that contingency could be redefined for ‘open’ propositions as follows: an open proposition is contingent if and only if it is not the case that it comes out true (or false) no matter how its variable is saturated (so that no closed proposition is contingent, just as no saturated predicate is true-or-false). Williamson’s response to this is that it “betray[s] a failure to grasp what contingency is” (ib.).⁶

Suppose we accept Williamson's argument against defining propositional truth-of on the model of predicative truth-of. Is there any other way of introducing the true of/true in distinction for propositions? Williamson considers how the distinction could be drawn for utterances:

An utterance of the sentence 'There are no utterances' in this world is true of a world in which there are no utterances. For the way the utterance says things to be is the way they are in that world.

Williamson then points out that this is just another way of stating that the utterance expresses a proposition that would be true if that world obtained; "in other words, the proposition is true in that world" (ib.). What reading is 'true in that world' being given here? It appears that it is the existential reading, for Williamson goes on to claim that "the utterance need not exist in that world in order to be true of it *because the proposition which it expresses in this world exists in that one*". As he provides no further argument for this claim, he must regard it as an immediate consequence of the expressed proposition being true in that world. But then, he seems to be begging the question against the proposed distinction, for it is not obvious that 'the utterance expresses a proposition that would be true if that world obtained' entails that the proposition *exists* in that world.

On these grounds, Williamson concludes that

The utterance need not exist in that world in order to be true of it because the proposition which it expresses in this world exists in that one...There is the illusion of a distinction between truth in a world and truth of a world for propositions because we appear to be able to model such a distinction on a corresponding distinction for utterances, forgetting that the presence of the latter depends on the absence of the former (2002: 240).

That is, the utterance can be true of w without existing in w just because the proposition it expresses *must* exist in w for the utterance to be true of w . However, the whole burden of proof for the contention that the proposition must exist in w is carried by the inference from 'proposition p would be true if world w obtained' to 'proposition p exists in w '. But the inference is ungrounded.⁷ Consequently, Williamson does not show that if the true of/true in distinction can be drawn for utterances (as it can) then it cannot be drawn for propositions. We are thus free to hold that it can be drawn for both, along the lines of the definitions we submitted.

I find it hard to regard either use of ‘true in w ’, existential or neutral, as uniquely legitimate. Perhaps it would serve the purpose of clarity to reserve the phrase for the existential reading; on the other hand, the neutral reading is widespread, and it has the tradition of possible world semantics on its side. What appears to be required, in any case, is awareness of the distinction and the different consequences that are entailed by each reading.

4. Thus, take thesis (R) and suppose it is given the neutral reading, i.e.

(R_b) If world w is non-minded, nothing is true *of* w .⁸

There is no reason why (R_b) should be true, whether or not truth bearers are mind dependent. A world w , minded or not, may well satisfy the truth condition for someone's belief that p . This vindicates the intuition that, in a sense, my belief that there are stars could be true even in a non-minded world (provided there are stars in it). On the other hand, if (R) is given the existential reading and truth bearers are mind dependent, then (R) –i.e., (R_a)– is true: if truth bearers are entities that do not exist in w and being true in w requires existence in w , then no truth bearers are true in w . The issue arises of whether mind independent entities such as (Fregean) propositions could be true in a world in the existential reading, i.e. whether it makes sense to say of such entities that they exist in a world. Opinions appear to be divided. Frege famously believed that thoughts “belong neither to my inner world as an idea nor yet to the outer world of material, perceptible things” (1918-19: 308); on the hypothesis that the actual world contains nothing else, thoughts are not denizens of the actual world. Perhaps Frege would have agreed that thoughts *could not* belong to the actual world, in which case one could say that, for him, thoughts do not exist in worlds, actual or possible.⁹ On the same side, Benson Mates (1986: 95) remarked that “it is hard to know what could be meant by saying that so abstract an entity as a proposition is in a possible world, that is, could have existed”.

Other philosophers have seen no difficulty in conceiving that such abstract entities exist in worlds, indeed, even in every possible world (including non-minded worlds): e.g. George Bealer (1993), Stephen Schiffer (1996), and Tim Williamson (2002) among others. We don't need to take sides in this dispute. If propositions and other mind independent truth bearers are not the kind of entities that exist in worlds, so that they cannot be true in a world in the existential reading, then (R) –i.e., (R_a)– is true for such entities, for its consequent is true: if propositions are truth bearers and they do not exist in w (for any w), then *a fortiori*

they are not (existentially) true in w . Such vacuous truth of R_a , however, ought not to comfort the Rortian for it does not support the mind dependence of truth: propositions are not existentially true in a world w whether or not w is minded. If on the other hand propositions do exist in worlds, then (R_a) is false, for, being mind independent, they may both exist in w and be true of w even if w is non-minded.

Summing up, as a statement of the mind dependence of truth (R) is unqualifiedly true only if truth bearers are mind dependent entities *and* 'true in w ' is given the existential reading.

5. Rorty had meant his remark on truth (or the lack thereof) in non-minded worlds as part of an attack against realism. Here is the full quotation:

Idealists sometimes said: "If there were no minds, there would be no stars". Pragmatists say only: "If there were no minds, there would be no one to use the term 'star'". Opponents like Russell ask: but would it not be *true* that there are stars? Pragmatists answer that question with another: what is 'be true' supposed to mean in a world in which there are no statements to be true nor minds to have true beliefs? (Rorty 1991: 3).

Rorty's point, which we have been identifying as thesis (R), is set as a reply to the Russellian realist's claim that even if there were no minds, it would still be true that there are stars. But (R) can be construed as a plausible objection to the realist's claim only thanks to the ambiguity of 'true in a world'. Suppose it is disambiguated. If it is given the existential reading, it counts as an objection against the realist only if the realist is made to hold that

Even in a non-minded world, there would exist mind dependent truth bearers to the effect that there are stars, and they would be true of such a world.

But there is no reason to saddle the realist with such an explicitly inconsistent claim. If on the other hand (R) is given the neutral reading then it does count as an objection to the realist's claim, but –as we saw– there is no reason to regard it as true.

In summary: against the realist who holds that even in a non-minded world it would be true that there are stars (if there are, indeed, stars in such a world), Rorty insists on the mind dependence of truth. Now, there is a sense in which truth *can* be regarded as mind dependent; but in that sense, the mind dependence of truth does not count as an objection against the realist, as the realist is committed to neither the existential reading of 'true in w ' nor the

assumption that truth bearers are mind dependent entities. To mount an attack against the realist, the Rortian must show that there are no truths in non-minded worlds even if truth bearers are *not* mind dependent and even if ‘true in *w*’ is *not* read existentially. So far, we found no argument to that effect.

6. It might seem that Rorty’s ‘idealist’ is providing such an argument, but he really isn’t. Rorty’s idealist says: ‘If there were no minds, there would be no stars’, or mountains, or dinosaurs. His rationale might be: to be a star is to fall under the concept of star. But in a non-minded world, there would be no categorizing of anything by anybody. Hence, in a non-minded world there would be no stars (*ditto* for mountains, dinosaurs, or whatever). No minds, no concepts; no concepts, no objects. This argument is based on the conflation of what are often regarded as two different uses of the concept ‘concept’:¹⁰ the second premise assumes that a concept is a mental entity, whereas the first does not necessarily take concepts to be mental. So, even granting both premises the argument is dubious to say the least.¹¹ However, if, for whatever reason, one held with the idealist that in a non-minded world there are no stars (or mountains, or dinosaurs), it might seem that he would have a reason to consider (R) true in the neutral reading, his reason being that *nothing* is true *of* a non-minded world; consequently, nothing is true in a non-minded world, even in the neutral reading.

But this is an obvious mistake, at least if we stick to the definition of ‘true of a world’ we gave above. For according to the definition, a truth bearer *A* is true of *w* iff *A*’s truth condition is satisfied by the way things are in *w*. Now, if *w*, a non-minded world, contains no stars, *w* satisfies the truth condition of a truth bearer to the effect that there are no stars; such a truth bearer is therefore true *of w*, and therefore true *in w* in the neutral reading. Thus, even the idealist cannot rescue the neutral reading of (R).¹²

7. As I recalled at the beginning, many years ago Martin Heidegger put forth a thesis similar to Rorty’s: he claimed that

Before Newton’s laws were discovered, they were not ‘true’. From this it does not follow that they were false [...] The fact that before Newton his laws were neither true nor false cannot mean that the beings which they point out in a discovering way did not previously exist. The laws became true through Newton, through them beings in themselves became accessible for Da-sein. With the discoveredness of beings, they show themselves precisely as the beings they previously were. (Heidegger 1927: 208).

Thus, not only did Newton's laws not create the planets or their orbits: before Newton, the objects of his discoveries already had just the properties that Newton came to attribute to them ("They show themselves precisely as the beings they previously were"). On the other hand, Newton's descriptions of such properties –Newton's laws- were not true (or false) before he devised them. Why? Because, in Heidegger's¹³ super-antirealistic view, truth is essentially connected with discovery: "To discover...is the kind of being of 'truth'" (ib.). There is truth only if there is discovery; but the possibility of discovery requires (potential) discoverers, i.e. the minded beings to whom Heidegger refers by the word 'Da-sein':

Before there was any Da-sein, there was no truth; nor will there be any after Da-sein is no more. For in such a case truth as disclosedness, discovering, and discoveredness *cannot* be. (ib.)¹⁴

So, Heidegger would have agreed that there were stars before minds came around, but it was not true that there were. Notice that the thesis that there was no truth before there were any minded beings does not entail that Newton's laws were not true before Newton (obviously other people had minds, even before Newton). That Newton's laws were not true before Newton follows from the connection between truth and discovery. Truth does not just require the *possibility* of discovery (thus the existence of minds): truth is only given in and through discovery.

8. There are parallels between holding

(R) If world w is non-minded, nothing is true in w

and holding that before there were any minds, there was no truth, nor will there be any after minds are gone, i.e.

(H) If the world at time t is non-minded, nothing is true in the world at t .

Whether or not talk of truth at some time can be represented as exactly paralleling talk of truth in a possible world,¹⁵ 'true in the world at t ' appears to exhibit the same ambiguity as 'true in

w' . Define 'A is true of the world at t ' as 'A's truth condition is satisfied by the state of the world at t '. Then, 'A is true in the world at t ' can be taken to mean either

(a_t) A exists in the world at t and is true of the world at t

or

(b_t) A is true of the world at t .

Heidegger's claim that (e.g.) it was not true (in the year 70M b.C.) that there were dinosaurs could then be seen as based on giving 'true [in the world] at t ' the a_t-reading while taking truth bearers to be mind dependent entities, exactly as Rorty's claim rested on giving 'true in w' ' the existential reading while taking truth bearers to be mind dependent. Apparently, (R) and (H) are on a par: it seems that either can be rejected by not identifying truth bearers with mind dependent entities, or else by claiming that truth in a world (truth at a time) does not require existence in that world (at that time). In fact, Heidegger's view rests on more solid ground than Rorty's.

Notice, first of all, that in Heidegger's view nothing can be true *of* the world at t –i.e., neutrally true- unless the world at t is minded. For it follows straight from Heidegger's definition of truth that truth is mind dependent: in Heidegger's case, mind dependence is not a consequence of the truth bearers being mind dependent entities; it is built into the very notion of truth. If 'It is true that A' *means* 'It is, or it has been discovered that A' (or something along these lines),¹⁶ then nothing can be true unless some mind is there to discover it. The world does not satisfy A's truth condition unless some mind is there to discover that it does: if A is true of the world at t , then the world at t is minded.

Secondly, it appears that the mind dependence of truth is indifferent to the truth bearers' nature: no matter whether they are taken to be statements, beliefs, or propositions, they can only be true if they are discovered to be. Whether or not they are mind dependent entities, their truth is mind dependent. Therefore, unlike (R), (H) cannot be challenged by questioning the mind dependent status of the truth bearers. Neither can it be challenged by pointing out that its truth requires the existential reading of 'true in (the world at) t ': as we just saw, even if 'true at t ' is read non-existentially it remains that nothing can be true unless there are minds to discover it. In short, (H) follows directly from Heidegger's definition of truth.

Not so with Rorty. In his case, (R) does not follow from his account of truth. As he put it himself, Rorty “swing[s] back and forth between trying to reduce truth to justification and propounding some form of minimalism about truth” (Rorty 1995: 282). Perhaps he sees the former option –epistemic reductionism– as involving the mind dependence of truth bearers, though it is not clear that it does, or that Rorty believes it does. Rorty's explicit case for (R), as we reconstructed it, is based on the assumption that truth bearers are mind dependent entities, but we saw that, in addition, it needs the existential reading of ‘true in w ’. The latter assumption does not seem to be motivated by either of his favourite accounts of truth.

9. Thesis (R) – the mind-dependence of truth in Rorty’s version– rests on two assumptions: that truth bearers are mind dependent entities, and that ‘true in w ’ is to be read existentially. On these assumptions, truth can be said to be mind dependent. We have, I believe, no strong reason to buy either assumption. But suppose we do: is there anything else that is wrong with thesis (R), besides its being relatively ungrounded?

One thing that might seem wrong is the following. Consider (Den):

$$(\text{Den}) \, p \text{ if and only if it is true that } p. \text{ }^{17}$$

People who take (Den) to have definitional import would regard all its instances as necessary truths. But, given (R), it would seem that some are not. Take

$$(\text{Den}_{\text{stars}}) \text{ There are stars if and only if it is true that there are stars,}$$

and consider a non-minded world w that is such that there are stars. In w , there are stars but it is not true that there are stars, for nothing is true in a non-minded world. Thus there is a world that is such that (Den_{stars}) fails: (Den_{stars}) is not a necessary truth.

But wait a minute. The argument I just gave is based on noticing that while the left-hand side of (Den_{stars}) holds in w , the right hand side does not, as w is assumed to be non-minded. When we say that the left-hand side ‘holds’ in w , we are thinking of the fact that there are stars in w (or that w is such that there are stars, or that it satisfies the condition expressed by ‘there are stars’). It thus seems that we are building the neutral reading of ‘true in w ’ into the analysis of the biconditional's truth conditions. This is not allowed by the assumptions under which we are reasoning: for we are now assuming, *inter alia*, that ‘true in’

is to be read existentially. Thus, a fairer analysis of $(\text{Den}_{\text{stars}})$'s truth conditions would be as follows: a biconditional such as $(\text{Den}_{\text{stars}})$ is said to be true iff both sides are true, or both are false. Under our present assumptions, neither $(\text{Den}_{\text{stars}})$'s right-hand side nor its left-hand side is true in w . Nor, of course, is either of them false in w (if falsity entails truth of the negation): both are indeterminate in w . Consequently, the biconditional itself is indeterminate.¹⁸ $(\text{Den}_{\text{stars}})$ fails in w not by being false in w , but by not being true. The general conclusion stands: not every instance of (Den) is true in every possible world, i.e. necessary.¹⁹

Such a conclusion should come as no surprise to a reasonable advocate of thesis (R). For in her view, truth in every possible world –hence necessity, under the customary definition- is out of the question for *any* truth bearer, and not just for instances of (Den) , at least if there are any non-minded worlds. If there are worlds such that no truth bearer is true in them, there are no necessary truths; although the reasonable advocate of thesis (R) may be willing to grant a restricted notion of necessity as truth in all *minded* worlds, i.e. in all worlds where truth is an issue. Moreover, an advocate of (R) will be specially opposed to regarding instances of (Den) as necessary truths: for it is exactly her point that worlds that are such that p are not (thereby) worlds in which it is true that p . Again, she will grant that instances of (Den) are true in all *minded* worlds. Such limitations may be an inconvenience, and some will see in them a further reason for rejecting (R) under any reading; but for the reasonable advocate of thesis (R), that instances of (Den) are not unqualifiedly necessary is just an expected consequence of her two assumptions, that truth bearers are mind dependent and that ‘true in w ’ entails ‘exists in w ’.²⁰

10. Heidegger’s trouble with (Den) is similar though not identical. It would be identical, *mutatis mutandis*, if Heidegger’s view were that, while

(1) There were dinosaurs at t [t = the year 70M b.C.]

it is not the case that

(2) It is true that there were dinosaurs at t .

Instances of (Den) would then be false at t . However, on the face of it this is not what Heidegger holds. He holds that, while (1), it is not the case that (3):

(3) It was true that there [were] dinosaurs at t .

Let the sentential operator 'P' stand for 'it was the case that', as usual; let 'T' stand for 'it is true that'; and let p be the sentence 'There are dinosaurs'. Then, Heidegger's view is that

(9) $Pp \ \& \ \sim PTp$

not that

(10) $Pp \ \& \ \sim T Pp$

Now, this wouldn't make much of a difference if (9) and (10) were logically equivalent; and they would be logically equivalent if ' PTp ' were equivalent to ' $T Pp$ '. Assuming (Den), one might think that the latter equivalence can be proved as follows:

1. p iff Tp [instance of (Den)]
2. PTp Hyp
3. Pp (1), (2), subst. of equivalents
4. Pp iff $T Pp$ [instance of (Den)]
5. $T Pp$ (3), (4), modus ponens

and similarly in the other direction. However, the proof assumes (at step (3)) that equivalents may be substituted for each other in the context ' $P[...]$ ', i.e. that 'P' is extensional. But 'P' was shown to be non-extensional long ago.²¹ On the other hand, 'P' was also shown to be intensional, which means that necessary equivalents can be substituted for each other in a P-context. If so, then (9) and (10) are logically equivalent if and only if p and Tp are regarded as necessarily (not just materially) equivalent. If instances of (Den) are regarded as necessarily true, then Heidegger's view concerning truth in the past is inconsistent with such instances being *eternal* truths: there would be (non-minded) moments of time at which they not hold.

Like in the previous case, this consequence should not be unwelcome to Heidegger or any other supporter of (H): if you believe that there can only be truth at certain times (the minded times), you will not want instances of (Den) to hold at all times.

11. Many philosophers have regarded the mind dependence of truth as a simple consequence of the mind dependence of the truth bearers. Consider the following quotations from thinkers as far apart as Henri Bergson and Ludwig Wittgenstein:

Modern philosophers have brought truth from heaven down to earth; but they still see in it something which is pre-existing to our affirmations. According to them, truth is lodged in things and facts: our science seeks it in them, draws it from its hiding-place and exposes it to the light of day. [...] This conception of truth is natural to our mind and natural also to philosophy, because it is natural to picture reality as a perfectly coherent and systematized whole sustained by a logical armature. This armature would be truth itself; all that our science does is to rediscover it. But experience pure and simple tells us nothing of the kind, and James confines himself to experience. Experience presents us a flow of phenomena: if a certain affirmation relating to one of them enables us to master those which follow or even simply to foresee them, we say of this affirmation that it is true. [...] Reality flows; we flow with it; and we call true any affirmation which, in guiding us through moving reality, gives us a grip upon it and places us under more favorable conditions for acting. (Bergson 1934, pp.254-255).

So you are saying that human agreement determines //decides// what is true //correct// or false //incorrect? Correct or incorrect exist only in thinking, and hence in the expression of thoughts. (MS 124, pp.212-213; quoted in Glock 1997, p.86).

Neither Bergson nor Wittgenstein is asserting that truth is mind dependent: not in so many words. However, if we call an "affirmation" (and *only* an affirmation) 'true' because of the function it plays in "guiding us through moving reality", it seems to follow that nothing would deserve to be so called if no one is there to be guided. Similarly, if correct (or incorrect) "exist only in thinking", it would seem there is no correctness where nobody is doing any thinking. Both moves are natural.

On the other hand, few thinkers, and certainly not Bergson or Wittgenstein thought that *reality* is mind dependent, i.e. that in a world devoid of minds there would be no mountains or stars. If, however, reality is not mind dependent but truth is, it follows that it is possible that [there are mountains though it is not true that there are], a conclusion that is in sharp conflict with what appears to be our customary use of the word 'true'. We saw that both Heidegger and Rorty were drawn to such a conclusion. Of course, one can bite the bullet and profess revisionism about truth; or one can give up the thesis that truth bearers are mind

dependent entities like Bergson's statements or Wittgenstein's thoughts. An alternative and less radical option consists in drawing a distinction between an existential and a neutral reading of 'true in a world': in the existential reading, there are no truths in a world devoid of minds, but in the neutral reading there may well be, even if truth bearers are mind dependent. Even if all minds disappeared from the Universe, my present belief that there are mountains in India would be true *of* such a non-minded Universe.

Contrapositively, if the distinction is rejected, then, in order to preserve the full force of (Den), one would be obliged to insist that truth bearers must be mind independent entities such as Frege's propositions. No doubt, many would favour this course anyway. It looks bizarre, however, that it should be forced upon us *simply* by the possibility that the world be non-minded.

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¹ To make this immediately plausible, 'statement' must apply to *statings*, i.e. acts of stating, rather than to *what is stated*, i.e. to statement contents: for it far from immediately obvious that the contents of statements are mind dependent. Similarly with beliefs.

² I am borrowing this formulation from Andrea Iacona (2003: 338). According to Iacona, "the truth of a truth bearer in alternative states of affairs [= possible worlds] depends on the satisfaction of its truth condition in those states of affairs, no matter what its ontological status is" (ib.); thus for him 'A is true in *w*' has only one reading, namely the neutral reading.

³ "When we say of a proposition *p* that it is true with respect to a possible world *w*, we do not predicate truth of *p*, with respect to *w*; we do not say of *p* that it is true *in* the possible world *w*" (ib.). I find this hard to understand except as a prescriptive remark concerning the use of 'true in *w*'.

⁴ As far as I know, Mates was the first to draw the distinction explicitly, though he credits Russell (1900: 32) with introducing the phrase 'true of a world' to express the neutral reading. – Thanks to Peter Simons for drawing my attention to Mates's distinction.

⁵ Another objection relies on a definition of the notion of a possible world in terms of validity of an argument. As Williamson himself notices, even if his argument is correct other definitions are possible.

⁶ Williamson goes on to argue, against David Lewis's modal realism, that such a view "misidentifies contingency as a special kind of indexicality" (ib.). I will not pursue the issue here.

⁷ Much more ought to be said on the issue, but this is not the proper place to do it. For example: Williamson argues that, as 'There are no utterances' is true of *w* (a world where there are no utterances), the proposition that there are no utterances is true in *w*, hence it exists in *w*. Consider 'There are utterances', which is false of *w*. Then the proposition that there are utterances is also false in *w*. Does it exist in *w*? In a parallel case, Williamson argues that if a possible world in which the proposition that *P* does not exist had obtained, "there would have been no proposition that *P*. *A fortiori*, there would have been no true proposition that *P*" (2002: 237). By the same reasoning, if the proposition that there are utterances did not exist in *w* then, had *w* obtained, there would have been no proposition that there are utterances, *a fortiori* no false proposition that there are utterances. Consequently, the proposition that there are utterances exists in *w* in spite of there being no utterances in *w*.

⁸ Is (R_b) self-defeating? If (R_b) is true, then if *w* is non-minded, nothing is true of *w*; but (R_b) itself is true of *w*, it seems. In order to avoid this consequence, the scope of the quantifier in (R_b)'s consequent must be suitably restricted: it should not include truth bearers that are about possible worlds. If one takes modal statements (or beliefs, etc.) implicitly to be about possible worlds, the restriction may turn out to be severe.

⁹ As Frege held that to be actual is to be causally efficacious (1918-19: 309), it could be argued that by denying that thoughts are actual he wasn't denying that they might exist, so to speak, alongside other entities without causally interacting with them; or at least, that he wasn't thereby committed to the non-existence of thoughts, in the actual world or in possible worlds.

¹⁰ Georges Rey's "metaphysically taxonomic function" and "epistemologically taxonomic function" respectively (Rey 1983: 241; cf. Rey 1994: 190, Margolis & Laurence 1999: 5-6).

¹¹ From the argument's conclusion it follows that a non-minded world is an empty world: in such a world, nothing would have any property (not even the property of being an individual or of being self-identical). An idealist might be happy with this consequence, for she could read it as a *reductio* of the idea of a non-minded world, which many idealists would regard as preposterous anyway.

¹² Unless (R) is restricted to atomic and quantified truths, excluding truth functional compounds. I.e., (R') = 'In a non-minded world there are no (non-truth-functional) truths', in the neutral reading, is entailed by the idealistic assumption (I owe this qualification to Achille Varzi).

¹³ More accurately, *early* Heidegger's. See Harrison 1991: 124.

¹⁴ Consistently, Heidegger goes on to say that "The fact that there are 'eternal truths' will not be adequately proven until it is successfully demonstrated that Da-sein has been and will be for all eternity. As long as this proof is lacking, the statement remains a fantastical assertion which does not gain in legitimacy by being generally 'believed' by the philosophers".

¹⁵ Gareth Evans (1985) thought it could not. I am not convinced by his argument, but anyway, it doesn't seem to affect the ambiguity I am pointing out.

¹⁶ Discovery must be understood as not outlasting *awareness* of discovery: if it has been discovered that *p*, then it is true that *p* and it remains true that *p* as long as there is someone to be aware that it was once discovered that *p*, though not longer than that. Otherwise, once it has been discovered that *p*, that *p* would remain true even after all minds have disappeared from the world, *contra* Heidegger.

¹⁷ I follow Künne (2003: 35) in labelling this principle 'the biconditional Denominalization Schema'.

¹⁸ Supposing that a biconditional's truth conditions are such as I just gave. If one takes a biconditional whose sides are both indeterminate to be true (rather than indeterminate), as e.g. in Bochvar's three-valued semantics, the consequence does not follow. Thus, the Rortian can retain the necessity of every instance of (Den) by adopting an appropriate non-standard semantics.

¹⁹ A much shorter argument would be the following: if w is non-minded, then $(\text{Den}_{\text{stars}})$ is not true in w because – under the present assumptions- *nothing* is true in w . I owe the present discussion of $(\text{Den}_{\text{stars}})$ to a remark of Paolo Casalegno.

²⁰ It could be argued that Rorty, in particular, has a special problem here because of his allegiance to Davidson's programme in semantics (see Rorty 1979: 259-262; 1982: xxvi; 1995: 286), as it could be argued that the programme is committed to the unqualified necessity of instances of (Den). Rorty could react by similarly limiting the scope of Davidson's programme.

²¹ 'Iceland is covered with a glacier' and 'Africa is covered with a glacier' have the same truth value (i.e. they are both false), whereas 'Iceland was (once) covered with a glacier' and 'Africa was (once) covered with a glacier' differ in truth value. See Thomason 1974: 36-37.